

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks at the Congressional Picnic

June 14, 2016

The President. Hello, everybody! Well, first of all, let's give a big round of applause to the best house band in the world, our outstanding Marine band. Give them a big round of applause. They can play anything. Bruno Mars. *[Laughter]* Yo-Yo Ma. It doesn't matter. I mean, they sounded great. I was rocking out a little bit in the Oval Office.

It is so good to see all of you at what is just a wonderful event. One of the only things that I don't like about this event is, each year, I see some of the same kids, and they're getting a lot taller—*[laughter]*—which means I'm getting a lot older. But for Members of Congress to be able to bring their families together on an incredible day like this is a true blessing.

Obviously, this has been a difficult week for America because all of us are still grieving for those who were lost in Orlando. All of us still have our thoughts and prayers for the families of those who were killed, but also for those who are still recovering and for the city of Orlando. And one of the things that—when I was talking to the mayor, Buddy Dyer, down there—I emphasized is that this is something that could happen anywhere. And these could be our kids or our brothers or our cousins or nephews, nieces.

And at moments like this, it's critically important for us to remind ourselves of what binds us together as a people: that regardless of race or ethnicity or religion or sexual orientation, we're all Americans, and we look out for each other. We celebrate those things we hold dear and have in common, like love of family and love of country. We mourn together when part of that family is hurt. And I know that that's something that all of you feel, whenever things like this happen, we squeeze our families a little more tightly, and we're reminded of what's important in life.

I'm not going to talk long because I want to shake as many hands as possible, although I've still got to apply the no selfie rule—*[laughter]*—because otherwise, I'm here for like 4 hours. But I do want to just say thank you to all of you. I want to say thanks to the Members of Congress who are here. I know that we're at a contentious time in our political life in this country. The truth is, though, it's important not to romanticize the past. Democracy has always been contentious, and it's always messy, because we're a big country and we're a diverse country. And people are not going to agree a hundred percent of the time on some of the big issues that we care about.

But one of the things I've tried to emphasize—and I spoke at a couple of commencements this past month—I said that one of the things about democracy is, is that it works because we try to compromise, even when you think you're a hundred percent right. In that sense, it's a lot like marriage. *[Laughter]* The—because as fierce and as important as the debates are, the institutions that we built, the Constitution upon which we're founded, the traditions and the habits of the heart that have allowed us to live in this greatest country on Earth—those are what's lasting. Those are more permanent and more important than any immediate difference or debate.

I think it's also important for us to remember at a time when partisanship is seemingly at an alltime high, that none of us are born Democrat or Republican. And the labels we apply to ourselves, they mean something. They indicate commitments or sets of principles that may not

always mesh up. But the things that really matter in our lives, they can't be captured by a party label. The things that bind this country together transcend political party. And it's useful for us to remember that as well, when we are engaging in these debates.

And I'm only going to be here a little bit longer——

Audience members. Aww.

The President. No, my lease is running out. [Laughter] And I'm already trying to look at the carpet and the walls to make sure I get my deposit back. [Laughter] But the—what I've told my staff—and I hope those of you who are serving are keeping in mind every single day—is that this is an extraordinary privilege, our chance to serve the American people; our chance to, in some very small way, shape history in ways that we hope are better. It's precious, and it's a privilege. And we should every single day count our blessings and apply ourselves to the work with an enthusiasm and a vigor that is appropriate for the privilege that the people of America bequeathed upon us.

And the last point I want to make is just, to the families, I want to say thank you. Because certainly, one thing that binds Democrats and Republicans together is that their families carry an enormous burden. You miss stuff. Time flies. You're away for a soccer game or a birthday party or a dance recital. And as somebody who just saw—I cried at my older daughter's graduation. [Laughter] It's a reminder that we a lot of times put our families in a tough situation, thinking that perhaps we can do some good. And they may believe in us real hard and make a lot of sacrifices, but they are sacrifices nonetheless.

So to the spouses, to the kids, we just want to say thank you. And that, too, should make us sober and serious about the work that we do, because if we're not actually making this country better, then it's not worth the sacrifice. And we owe it not just to the people who elected us, but also to our own families to make sure that we make the very best of it.

So I want to thank all of you. I want to thank again the Marine band. I want to point out that sometimes people don't realize, our Marine band, these are Active Duty folks. They're serving our country. Our hearts go out to the people of Orlando. But our hearts also are filled with gratitude for those men and women in uniform who serve us every day, those law enforcement and first responders who, at times of desperate need like what we saw in Orlando, are there on the spot, trying to make sure that they're keeping us safe. We are extraordinarily grateful to them.

All right? Have a great time, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:54 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House.

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